

**EXTERNAL**

28 February 1995

**Vasiliy SKVORTSOV ( \_\_\_\_\_ )**

**Kyrgyzstan**

The information currently available on this case comes from an unofficial source, which reports that Vasiliy Skvortsov was sentenced to death on 9 June 1994 by the City Court in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, for premeditated, aggravated murder. It is believed that the Supreme Court rejected his appeal against the death sentence. This would mean that Vasiliy Skvortsov's last hope of avoiding execution is to lodge a petition for clemency with the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Vasiliy Skvortsov is 21 years old. According to our source, the murder that he is charged with was committed during a quarrel. Vasiliy Skvortsov has not denied his guilt. However, he is suffering from a mental handicap and has been under regular medical supervision since 1983. His lawyer has stated that the prosecution regarded the offence as being compatible with his state of health, i.e. he was considered to be mentally competent. Statements of medical experts, however, run counter to the prosecution's conclusion. It is also reported that during the court's final session, at which the death sentence was announced, Vasiliy Skvortsov was left without legal representation, which constitutes a violation of Kyrgyz legislation.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and without reservation, on the grounds that it is a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Amnesty International is appealing to the authorities in the Kyrgyz Republic to commute the death sentence passed on Vasiliy Skvortsov.

**Background information**

In 1992 Kyrgyzstan cut the number of offences punishable by death in peacetime from 18 to 15, and the number of wartime capital offences from 14 to two. Officials have told Amnesty International of plans to reduce further the number of peacetime capital offences to three or four in a new penal code currently in preparation. Moreover, speaking to an Amnesty International delegation to Kyrgyzstan in April 1992, the Procurator General noted that in current practice death sentences are passed only for murder under aggravating circumstances.

Justice Ministry officials made available to Amnesty International in April 1992 statistics for the number of death sentences passed and carried out between 1987 and 1991. These showed that on average eight death sentences had been passed annually between 1987 and 1990, and that all of

these had been carried out. In 1991 the number of death sentences rose sharply to 21, seven of which have already been carried out. One execution was reported in 1992. Execution is by shooting. In February 1993 the head of the Department for Citizenship and Clemency Questions at the President's Office informed Amnesty International that three death sentences passed in 1991 had recently been commuted to 20 years' imprisonment. A fourth death sentence was commuted in October 1993. Amnesty International had taken up these cases, and unofficial sources in Kyrgyzstan reported that Amnesty International's campaign had made a decisive contribution to their positive resolution. At least one execution was carried out in 1993, however. In 1994 three cases taken up by Amnesty International ended in commutation, but in a fourth the death sentence was carried out.

Cases where the defendants are charged with offences carrying a possible death sentence are heard at first instance in regional courts, the Bishkek City Court or the Supreme Court. A defence lawyer must assist in capital cases. Prisoners can appeal against the verdict or sentence to the next highest court within seven days of receiving a written copy of the judgment. Since their cases are heard at a higher level at first instance, however, prisoners under sentence of death have fewer opportunities to appeal than many other prisoners.

Death sentences may also be reduced by a judicial review. Under this procedure a higher court re-examines the case after it has received a protest against the judgment of the court of first instance or the court of appeal. If all other remedies fail, prisoners under sentence of death can petition for clemency, which may be granted by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. Following the break-up of the USSR such prisoners no longer have the opportunity for a judicial review or petition to be considered by the federal USSR authorities, and have thereby lost a possible final avenue for commutation. Prior to this, legal authorities estimated that it could take some two years for a death penalty case to reach resolution.